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*The
Vanishing
Race*

ELLA HIGGINSON

The Vanishing Race

And Other Poems

BY

ELLA HIGGINSON

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AGAIN," "ALASKA, THE GREAT COUNTRY," "FROM THE
LAND OF THE SNOW-PEARLS," ETC.

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TO
MR. EDWARD S. CURTIS
WITH HOMAGE FOR HIS ART

THE VANISHING RACE

(A Picture by Edward S. Curtis)

*Into the shadow, whose illumined crest
Speaks of the world behind them where the sun
Still shines for us whose day is not yet done,
Those last dark ones go drifting. East or West,
Or North or South—it matters not; their quest
Is toward the shadow whence it was begun;
Hope in it, Ah, my brothers! there is none;
And yet—they only seek a place to rest.*

*So mutely, uncomplainingly, they go!
How shall it be with us when they are gone,
When they are but a mem'ry and a name?
May not those mournful eyes to phantoms grow—
When, wronged and lonely, they have drifted on
Into the voiceless shadow whence they came?*

A PRAYER

God of the lonely soul,
God of the comfortless,
God of the broken heart—for these,
Thy tenderness!

For prayers there be enough,
Yea, prayers there be to spare,
For those of proud and high estate;
Each hath his share.

But the beggar at my door,
The thief behind the bars;
And those that be too blind to see
The shining stars;

The outcast in his hut,
The useless and the old;
Whoever walks the city's streets
Homeless and cold;

The sad and lone of soul
Whom no man understands;
And those of secret sin, with stains
Upon their hands;

And stains upon their souls;
Who shudder in their sleep,
And walk their ways with trembling hearts,
Afraid to weep;

A PRAYER

For the childless mother, Lord,
And ah, the little child
Weeping the mother in her grave,
Unreconciled—

God of the lonely soul,
God of the comfortless,
For these, and such as these, I ask
Thy tenderness!

Whose sin be greatest, Lord;
If each deserve his lot;
If each but reap as he hath sown—
I ask Thee not.

I only ask of Thee
The marvel of a space
When these forgot and blind may look
Upon Thy face.

ONCE MORE TO VOYAGE TO THE PURPLE WEST

Would I were in Alaska this fair night!

Sailing that noble sweep of sapphire sea

Where for a thousand miles continuously

The snow-pearl mountains shimmer, lustrous, white,

Or burn to opals in the northern light.

But once again to gaze with longing eyes

Where sheer from sparkling ocean-depths they rise

To ravish the beholder with delight!

To hear the thunder of the waves that break

Full on some glacier's proud and splendid breast,

Where Color moves with wingéd sandals shod;

Once more to voyage to the purple West;

To feel my soul with speechless rapture ache—

My praying heart swell big and sweet with God!

THE YELLOW STAR OF LOVE

Venus—the yellow star of Love—is gone.
From the soft silver beauty of the West
Where like a jewel on a lovely breast
She shone resplendent, she has now withdrawn;
She has passed on to ravish the pale dawn.
But since her brilliance has the evening blessed,
The earth with dreariness is now oppressed.
After her splendor others seem but wan.

So, Dearest, since thy love's impassioned fire
Was kindled in my being's inmost shrine,
And all my trembling rapture and desire
Went up to God as incense pure and fine—
Naught could have power to quicken or inspire
If Love's bright star in splendor should decline.

HOW WILL IT BE ?

It is night—and the weary town
 Is lying asleep and still ;
The stars burn soft in the blue ;
 The dove plains to the hill.

The moon is low in the West,
 The wind is sweet of the sea,
A cricket out in the dark
 Is shrilling a threnody.

Forever the stars will burn,
 And the wind be sweet of the sea ;
The dove still plain to the hill,
 The cricket to the lea.

But out, far out in the dark,
 In a house that is cool and deep,
We of the restless hearts
 Shall be lying fast asleep.

How will it be with us then,
 From the warmth and the love apart ?
Will the old tears ache in the eyes—
 The old wish in the heart ?

HOW WILL IT BE ?

Will we awaken and think
Of the cruel words we spoke?
Of the faith we did not keep—
The hearts we hurt or broke?

Must we lie down at last
To tears and vain regret?
Or will God whisper low—
“Poor sorry ones, forget”?

THE SOFT WET LIPS OF THE RAIN

The warm South-Wind went grieving,
Grieving across the plain,
And longed with a passionate longing
For the soft, wet lips of the Rain.

Stood up the scarlet roses,
All lovely in a row,
And with their sweets beguiled him:
"O South-Wind, do not go!"

And lolled the crimson poppies
In languid splendor deep,
With satin lips entreating—
"Stay, stay, South-Wind, and sleep!"

The pansy sweet attempted
To lure him to her breast:
"In cool dark beds of velvet,
O South-Wind, stay and rest."

Yea, even the bashful lily,
With pearliness aglow,
Hung low her head and whispered—
"Dear South-Wind, do not go!"

But the South-Wind still goes grieving,
Grieving across the plain;
And longs with a passionate longing
For the soft wet lips of the Rain.

UP, MY HEART, AND SING

The dark, dark night is gone,
The lark is on the wing,
From bleak and barren fields he soars,
Eternal hope to sing.

And shall I be less brave
Than yon sweet lyric thing?
From deeps of failure and despair,
Up, up, my heart, and sing!

The dark, dark year is gone;
The red blood of the Spring
Will quicken Nature's pulses soon,
So up, my heart, and sing!

THE LITTLE CHURCH AT SITKA

The little church at Sitka—
It was so cool and still!
The doors stood open to the sea,
The wind went thro' at will
And bore the kiss of brine and blue
To the far emerald hill.

The little church at Sitka—
It was so dim and sweet!
Along the curving, silver beach
We heard the soft waves beat;
We knelt alone—while Holiness
Went by on sandalled feet.

The pictured church at Sitka
That hangs upon my walls—
I turn and look, and ah, my heart!
The far sea pleads and calls;
The sunset reddens far—and then—
Night's darkening shadow falls.

Ah, little church at Sitka!
If I might kneel to-day
Within thy dim and sea-sweet aisles,
With trembling lips to pray
For my heart's deep and sweet desire—
Could God still answer "Nay"?

GIVE CONTENT TO OTHERS

God, give content to others; but to me
 The throbbing night and bugle-noted day;
 No peaceful valleys, but the strong, salt spray
Of some large sea.

Give me no transient pain that frets and stings;
 Let me be as the nightingale forlorn,
 That, leaning her bruised breast upon a thorn,
Bleeds while she sings.

Give me, O God, not overmuch of sweet;
 Let me climb heights and, looking backward, see
 My own blood-prints, and know the agony
Of stone-cut feet.

For more and more I feel that not for me
 Are little passions and delightful ways;
 Only can I thro' torturing nights and days
Climb up to Thee.

TO EACH HIS NEED

To the hungry, Lord, give food;
 To the cold, a cheerful fire;
To the young man, a faith to keep;
 To the maid, her heart's desire.

To the old, give memories;
 To youth, ideals fair;
To him that, singing, fares alone,
 The stars and wide sweet air.

To the lonely, kindness, Lord;
 To the homeless one, a home;
And unto him of the wandering foot,
 The long, wild road to roam.

To the timid one, the mead
 With daisies dappled o'er;
But to the passionate-hearted, Lord,
 The ocean's surge and roar.

Yea, mountains vast and high,
 Crowned with eternal snow;
And thundering to the purple sea,
 The glaciers' splendid flow.

Unto each one his need,
 Though it be light or deep;
And unto all in sorrow, Lord—
 The blessed boon of sleep.

SONG TO A LUTE

The evening star comes to the sky,
To the steadfast shore, the sea;
But thou, so dear and so long waited for,
Comest not to me.

The sun returns at dawn and floods
With light earth's darkest spot;
But thou, so dear and my heart's only light,
Returnest not.

The sky waits nightly for the star,
The shore waits for the sea;
Far, lone, are they But ah, how lonelier
I wait for thee!

THE SONG-PRAYER

Across the Sabbath hush,
 The Sabbath silence—Hark!
Uprises sweet and golden-clear
 The song of the meadow-lark.

Oh, let me breathe a prayer,
 Though it be sad and late,
And bear it in thy notes, O lark,
 To heaven's very gate!

'Tis said one stands and waits
 For each plea spoken clear,
To bear it thro' the golden ways,
 That God himself may hear.

Then all the angel-ones
 Will bend and murmur—"Hark!"
When my poor prayer floods heaven's space
 In the song of the meadow-lark.

And will God be less kind,
 Though it be sad and late,
When all my passion and desire
 Mount, singing, thro' the gate?

THE PASSION-CALL

First a slender, pointed spear
Cleft the brown earth sharp and clear;
Then the sun shone warmly; up
Sprang the yellow crocus-cup.

It was February; lo,
Straight across the gold and snow,
Trembling, flute-like, sweet and shrill,
Down the alder-tasselled hill—

“Phœbe! Phœbe!” dropped the call,
Saddest bird-note of them all;
Deep in delicate passion set—
Who that hears it could forget?

Out the pure wake-robins came;
Buttercups like golden flame;
Warmer shone the sun—until
March stood singing on the hill.

Pale spring-beauties, pink and white,
Spread their petals over-night;
Star-flowers glimmered in the dark
Of their own leaves' shadow . . . Hark!

Plaintive, pleading, shrill and high,
Still that trembling voice goes by;
Draws its sweetness thro' the heart,
Till the quick tears ache and smart.

THE NEW WEST

Stand up, my West! Lift thy young, noble head
 On the strong pillar of thy rounded throat,
 And let thy challenge to the nations float.
In the world's march, keep step with lofty tread
And firm. If passion from the South has fled
 And from the East and West, there yet remains
 Its leaping fire in thy full, swelling veins.
If others have forgot the flag that led
To independent freedom, and now fail
 To stand in their own strength and pride, and try
 To ape the older nations, thou, my West,
Stand true—nor let thy stern eyes ever quail,
 As long as thou hast breath for freedom's cry,
 And a strong, passionate heart within thy breast!

THE OPAL-SEA

Wide wave on wave of rosy-misted gold
 Outstretched beneath an opalescent sky,
 Wherein soft tints with glowing splendors vie;
From far, dim ocean-distances are rolled
Sweet perfumes by the sea-wind strong and cold;
 Here white sails gleam and purple shadows lie,
 And isles are kissed by winds that wanton by,
Or rocked by storms in unchecked passion bold.

Locked in by swelling, fir-clad hills it lies,
 One sweep of undulating gold; serene,
 It shines and reaches under sunset skies;
The chaste Olympics pearl the space between,
 Till, burning in that splendid fire, they make
 Fit setting for this peerless ocean-lake.



THE NIGHTS OF SORROW

The long day wears into the longer night ;
 Silence comes on ; across the heedless town
 The lights go out, as others lay them down
To sleep ; but I, oh, God ! until the light
Of dawn steals up the mountains vast and white
 Watch by my window ; mine is Sorrow's gown,
 And on my desolate brow her heavy crown
More heavily bears with each hour's aching flight.

To sleep ! Only to sleep ! For but a while
 To dream I am a little child again,
 Unknown to Grief or aught wherefor to weep !
Into the far green fields to cross the stile ;
 To pluck the flowers ; revel in the rain !
 Oh, but to dream this dream ! Oh, but to sleep !

ORCAS ISLE

The sea is blue round Orcas Isle,
And every summer day
The waves, like little merry maids,
Romp up to laugh and play.

The hills are green on Orcas Isle,
The woods are cool and deep,
With slender creeks where bleeding-hearts
Hang rosy heads in sleep.

Days loiter by on Orcas Isle;
A sail blows full and white;
An oar gleams thro' the sapphire depths;
Then—it is night!

The sails drift back to Orcas Isle;
Stars glimmer and are gone;
The oars drip opals; lights go out;
Then—it is dawn!

Not sleep, but dreams, on Orcas Isle;
The doors let in the sea
With its mysterious fragrances
And weird, sweet melody.

Blue miles reach out from Orcas Isle—
North, East and South and West,
That every care-encumbered heart
May wander there and rest.

PERPETUATION OF LOVE

When I am dead, my love shall be a flower
That blossoms in thy pathway pure and white;
A burst of bird-song, or a ray of light
That sifts across thy darkest, saddest hour.
A rainbow shining through a sudden shower;
A dream that steals across thy longest night
And thrills thee with the old-time, dear delight—
That wakened only at my tender power.

Yea, far to Northward, scaling cliff and scar,
Thy feet may halt upon a glacier's rim—
While round about thee, glimmering afar,
God's noble mountains on thy vision swim;
And soft above thee, burning in a star,
My love shall all the other stars wear dim.

TO LIFE

Take not endeavor from me. To the last
 Give me the quick blood and the eager heart;
 The ecstasy of striving; and the smart
Of failure's needles pricking fine and fast
To goad me to achievement. Unaghost,
 Let me endure to tread, alone, apart—
 Led by the soft, compelling hand of Art—
The paths by which lone, toiling ones have passed.

Yea, let me joy and suffer, live and love;
 Soar boundless heights on Aspiration's wing,
 Or speak with God in wide and desolate plains.
Let me know all! The quiet of the dove;
 The sage's wisdom; and the exquisite sting
 Of liquid fire-drops burning in my veins.

SOUL-SICK AM I

Soul-sick am I, O God, of little things—
 Small pleasures, aspirations, creeds, desires;
 Low valleys, slender brooks and hearthside fires.
I want the sweep of wide, triumphant wings;
The halleluiah that the ocean sings;
 The wind that roars like beasts and never tires!
 Great God, my soul aches for the mighty lyres
Of Nature! For men heritaged as kings,
Who dare, aspire, achieve, not counting cost,
 So that a deed be done that reaches far—
 A new land won; a perilous water crossed;
So that a man coming to his last rest
 Shall wear upon his brow the splendid star
 That leads the glorious empire-builders West!

THE RAINBOW

"Sweet—sweet—sweet!"

Straight thro' the wind and rain
A bird on the leafless alder bough
Whistles the clear refrain.

"Sweet—sweet—sweet!"

And oh, low-faring heart,
In thy trembling deeps how quick and brave
Are the leaves of hope that start.

"Sweet—sweet—sweet!"

Bird on the alder's crest,
God has heard; His promise burns—
A luminous bow—in the West.

THE PIONEERS OF THE WEST

Would God that we, their children, were as they—
Great-souled, brave-hearted, and of dauntless will!
Ready to dare, responsive to the still,
Compelling voice that called them night and day
From this far West, where sleeping Greatness lay
Biding her time. Would God we knew the thrill
That exquisitely tormented them, until
They stood up strong and resolute to obey!

God, make us like them, worthy of them; shake
Our souls with great desires; our dull eyes set
On some high star whose quenchless light will wake
Us from our dreams, and guide us from this fen
Of selfish ease won by our fathers' sweat.
Oh, lift us up—the West has need of Men!

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